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ABSTRACT

Because they have difficulty in processing textual material, learning disabled, limited English speaking students, and reading deficient students create special problems for all teachers. Content area teachers can help these students by using a simple three-step strategy. The first phase, labeled TALK, involves prereading, with the readers considering both themselves and the material and then "talking it over" in their minds. The second phase, labeled USE, takes place during reading, with both the students and the teacher considering how the learners will process information as they bring meaning to the printed page. The learners must consider what they will be expected to do with the material once it has been perused. The third, or postreading phase, asks students to do something MORE with what they have read. A cognitive map (or webbing) is possible as is talking over the material with members of the class. By emphasizing reading material in the classroom, teachers demonstrate that reading is an access to information and ideas. Once students realize this, teachers can design lessons and activities to help them process the material and learn the ideas. (The paper includes ideas, methods, and approaches that can be used with low ability readers.) (HOD)

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HELPFUL HINTS FOR SECONDARY CONTENT TEACHERS:

HOW TO TEACH THE POOR READER

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HELPFUL HINTS FOR SECONDARY CONTENT TEACHERS:

HOW TO TEACH THE POOR READER

As reading teachers, we have all encountered the following scenario. The social studies teacher comes to the teacher's lounge visibly upset because Jesse, the new Spanish speaking child in the 7th grade is doing poorly on her tests in class. As she expresses this concern, the science teacher adds that although he is also having trouble with Jesse, his real problem is with Mary, the mainstreamed learning disabled (LD) student. She just can't understand photosynthesis even though he's assigned extra reading on the subject. The math teacher then nods agreement wishing that all her students were more efficient at reading and problem-solving in general. Into the middle of this discussion, walks the reading teacher who instantly gets bombarded with questions. "How do I teach a non-native speaker to understand social studies concepts? How do I teach science terms to LD kids? How do I motivate my students to want to read and learn?" The final question is the hardest of all to handle, but it gets quickly at the heart of their irritation: "Why don't you teach them how to read better?" With a situation like this to deal with, it's easy to see how reading teachers could be frustrated and annoyed with content area teachers who want quick and easy solutions to seemingly insurmountable problems. This paper addresses these issues and seeks to answer the questions that reading teachers often hear from content area teachers. The main concerns we deal with are the students with low intellectual ability, the students with language deficiencies, and the students who are simply inefficient readers. We first address some theoretical issues concerning these types of students and then give practical advice for activities and strategies to be used in the classroom. The suggestions offered here are not new to most reading specialists, but they may be considered new and even revolutionary to the content area teacher who is unsure

how to supplement the textual information that is designed to introduce new concepts and ideas to students. What we have done is to compile a list of ideas, methods, and approaches that can be used as a quick reference for the reading teacher seeking help for content area teachers having trouble with low ability readers.

An important distinction must be made at the outset between students with true reading problems and those students who are merely perceived to have reading problems by teachers who are not reading specialists. Many content area teachers have incorrect ideas about what really constitutes a reading problem. A low-ability reader is not someone who simply has trouble reading aloud. A child with a poor attitude about learning or one who does poorly on tests can't be assumed to have a reading problem based on this evidence alone. Students with an unfamiliar dialect are often labeled as low ability readers, and even things like a poor self-concept or an unstable home life can lead teachers to believe that students are having trouble reading. While all of these can certainly influence and affect a child's ability to perform well in a classroom, none of them can be used singly to label a child as a low ability reader. But we must admit that we do have students in our classrooms who have trouble processing textual information and the emphasis of this paper is not to merely identify them, but to come up with ways to help them.

One of the first things that we as reading teachers need to realize, and what we need to pass on to our colleagues who teach in the content area, is that we know some very specific things about the way children learn. Some of these assumptions about learning are as follows.

1. Children learn much from others without instruction.
2. Children can learn what is interesting and valuable for themselves.
3. Children do whatever seems best for themselves.
4. Children learn in proportion to their confidence that they can learn.
5. Children learn through concrete experiences.
6. Children learn more by taking reponsibility for their own learning.

7. Children learn when they identify what is important to them and establish their own purposes.
8. Children learn when learning meets needs and is relevant to their out of school lives.
9. Children learn when they are psychologically comfortable.
10. Children learn what they discuss in their own words.

Based on these assumptions, we have some specific ideas for use with those low ability readers in your classroom and in the content area classes down the hall. It is very difficult to follow the path to understanding if there are not a few sign posts along the way. When teachers are confronted with readers who do not seem to know where they are going and certainly don't know how to get there, we propose a plan in which students divide the reading process into three phases (see Figure 1). The first phase labeled TALK is one of pre-reading. It involves the reader considering both himself and the material and then talking it over in his mind. "Am I all set physically? Am I ready mentally? Is there something I need to know first? Do I know what I may be discovering?" The second phase, labeled USE, is the during-reading component. Both the students and the teacher must consider how the learners will process information as they bring meaning to the printed page. The teacher must consider how different readers, because of their background, will react differently to the material presented. The learners must consider what they will be expected to do with the material once it has been perused. The third or post-reading phase asks the students to do something MORE with what they have read. A cognitive map or webbing is possible as is talking over the material with members of the class.

A strategy for presenting this reading plan involves the teacher at first directing the pre-reading phase and then with a later selection transfering the technique to the student via the construction of who, what, when, and where questions. The teacher would also need to give the student partially complete cognitive maps in the initial stages. Students would also be given time in class to compare maps in small groups to bring closure to the material.

This plan has several advantages for the content area teacher. First it takes very little time away from the content to be covered, secondly its three phases will benefit efficient information processors while being most helpful to the low ability reader. Third, it suggets that the teacher values reading and knows that anyone can learn via the reading process if given a little help.

The next suggestions to be offered relate to the students that are referred to as the learning disabled. As a result of the Education for All Handicapped Children Act of 1975, students with specific learning disabilities are routinely mainstreamed into regular academic classes. The rationale behind mainstreaming is that the benefits of association with average students in regular classes outweighs any negative effects that might be incurred as a result of the handicap.

Unfortunately, learning disabled children frequently suffer more distress than necessary as a result of their own self image. Other problems occur due to inadvertent behaviors that teachers exhibit. Some suggestions are proffered here to assist the regular classroom teacher when working with learning disabled students.

Teachers should start by exhibiting understanding that learning disabled students are, indeed, handicapped. This handicapping condition is deceptive, and while teachers cognitively understand that the condition exits, it is sometimes difficult to accept. These students, after all, do not "look handicapped." That is, there are no obvious physical characteristics such as are evident with visual, auditory, or otherwise physically handicapped children. Nor does the LD student have the appearance of obvious mental deficiencies as in Down's Syndrome. It is usually more difficult to make allowances for the less obviously handicapped. These students, in fact, are quite often dismissed as lazy, disinterested, or inattentive and these feelings may persist or be compoun-ded by the elusive nature of learning disabilities.

Kirk and Gallagher (1979) offered a definition of learning disabilities that sheds light on the condition. The definition states that:

> A specific learning disability is a psychological or neurological impediment to spoken or written language or perceptual, cognitive, or motor behavior. (p. 285)

In addition, Major and Walsh (1977, p. 2), noted that "The [learning disabled] child may be unusually active, but these characteristics may be the result, rather than the cause, of the main learning difficulty." These definitions indicate the broad scope of learning disabilities while they also demonstrate the lack of any specific behaviors which would alert the teacher that a problem really does exist.

A teacher may understand about a student's disabilities and may have optimistic expectations, but if lacking an adequate repetoire of skills to deal with the problem, might not be able to help the student at all. Since the range of disabilities covered by the single label of "learning disabilities" is so great, no one single method of instruction can be employed. The point emphasized here is that the teacher should be flexible when dealing with LD youngsters. Therefore, if one method or approach does not work, try another.

One very useful activity for working with LD students during both pre-reading and post-reading is to have computers available for extra help and material. Computers are interesting to most learners and LD students are no exception. Depending on the activity, kinesthetic, visual, and auditory modes can all be employed with a computer. In addition, computers offer immediate feedback and are excellent for individualizing instruction. For the student who is easily bored and frustrated with textual material, the computer can provide a novel and enjoyable tool for conveying information. Most content area teachers are familiar with simulation, tutorial, and drill and practice programs for their subject matter, but may be unaware of the ways computers can be used to

supplement reading material for the student having trouble with the regular text. Additional reading material may be put into the computer for students to read and reread at their own pace. Vocabulary lists and remedial reading assign-ments may appear less tedious and threatening if introduced via the computer.

When working solely with very young children, concrete examples might be needed when teaching new concepts and vocabulary. One idea to make the words more concrete for students is to cut words from sandpaper. When a child traces the letter with his fingers, he can see and feel the letter, receiving both visual and kinesthetic stimuli. A sandbox is useful for allowing students to gain practice writing words and numbers. Again, both kinesthetic and visual modalities are employed and an extra benefit is that the figures can be practiced as many times as needed. When finished, one merely smoothes the sand and the next student is ready to start.

Other useful items that may be of benefit with younger children include pointers and tachistoscopes. Pointers may be useful in teaching situations where left to right eye tracking is a problem while tachistoscopes are helpful with vocabulary retention. These are two valuable tools for helping LD students cope with reading material that will be encountered in a content area class.

Another point of which teachers need to be aware, especially with young children or non-successful readers, is print style. Non-standard type such as italics or old English print can cause unnecessary confusion for students. Especially with a learning disabled child who might have particular difficulty with discrimination, these alternate lettering systems can cause considerable frustration.

For older students or those with more advanced abilities, several informal activities can be used to facilitate learning. Students enjoy activities such as puzzles and games. Rebus puzzles, word find games, scrabble, bingo, and

crossword puzzles are favorites. These are easily procured by teachers via magazines and newspapers and often entire books can be found that are devoted solely to these activities. These novel approaches can be made to address pre or post-reading activities in almost any subject or content area. Social studies, science, literature, and math all abound with terms or ideas which could be material for puzzle development.

In addition to puzzles and games, older students can receive benefit from some of the following items: 1) Comic books with academic content. These are usually factual, easy to read and motivating to students 2) Books written on age appropriate topics. Although these are usually written in a simplified form, they hold adolescent interest much better than materials geared to younger children 3) Newspaper articles. These very often contain practical reading material which is of interest to teenagers (ie. job applications, advertisements, advice columns). 4) Highway signs. All teenagers seem to want to know how to drive and this desire can be highly motivational. 5) Clothing labels. (ie. designer jeans, etc.) 6) Funny cards. Cards for birthday, Christmas, Halloween, and Valentine's Day hold student interest and are seen as useful by readers.

It should be noted here that these are merely suggestions. This list is by no means the entire list of possible activities. Instead, it represents a series of alternative activities which may be of use when dealing with learning disabled students. It is also stressed that these activities are supplements to, not replacements for, regular academic work.

One additional topic that should be addressed is the attention span of LD students. Due to excessive distractibility or, in many cases, hyperactivity, LD handicapped children frequently have an incredibly short attention span. Therefore, teachers should attempt to keep activities short in duration. Multiple

short term tasks are generally preferable to one or two long tasks. In addition, due to the excessive distractibility of many LD students, study carrels might be helpful when doing individual work.

When working with LD students it is helpful to keep three things in mind. First, the teacher must understand that a handicap does, indeed, exist. Second, a positive approach is essential if LD children are to experience success. Finally, success with LD students is dependent to a large degree upon individualization. The inclusion of these three ideas will not guarantee success when working with learning disabled students, but it will provide a solid basis from which to proceed.

While the mainstreamed learning disabled child does indeed cause problems of added instructional planning for most teachers, we can see that the problem is by no means insurmountable. Teachers can adapt methods and instructional strategies to fit the needs of these students, and using the few helpful hints listed here encourage understanding and achievement with textual material. When viewed in relation to the assumptions about learning mentioned above, it is easy to see how these suggestions would be valuable for the content area teacher when dealing with readers with learning disabilities.

As already stated, however, the LD student is not the only child that teachers encounter when considering those students who have trouble with textual information. The limited English proficient child is another student that requires special care and attention from teachers who rely on reading material to convey concepts and ideas.

Recent statistics underscore the importance of addressing the special needs of limited English proficient (LEP) students in the classroom. They exhibit a high dropout rate (Thonis, 1984) and those who remain in school are more likely to encounter numerous academic frustrations and even grade retention due to difficulties with the English language.

The significance of this information should be apparent to every classroom teacher. Language minority students are at risk, and teachers need to develop strategies for effectively working with LEP students. Of prime concern is the area of reading, especially at the secondary level. As the student progresses from elementary to secondary level, reading capability becomes an increasingly important tool associated with academic achievement (Thonis, 1970). Furthermore, along the road from elementary to secondary, teachers become less concerned with the reading process in general and more concerned with conveying subject matter specifics.

What then do secondary teachers need to know in order to help the LEP student to read more effectively? Awareness of the difficulties associated with reading in a second language is a start. Buck (1975, p. 91) specifies three problem areas: "(1) the reader's input (what he brings to the reading process); 2) the author's input (the cues from which the reader must select) and 3) the reading process itself (the interaction of both the reader's input and the author's input)."

Teachers can help LEP students use this interactive process to understand textual material as they remind students of the three phases of the reading process as outlined above. Before reading even begins, teachers can help to build schema and concepts that may be foreign to the students. The students should be reminded to use these new schemata during reading to help them interpret and understand the ideas and concepts being conveyed. Finally, teachers can design class discussion for a post-reading activity that solidifies the new schema for future reading and comprehension.

The biggest problem that teachers must face when dealing with second language learners is the obvious difference in culture. Language is a reflection of that culture; however, the first language of the student may differ dramati-

cally in cultural content such as values, goals, and taboos from the target language to be learned. In addition, conceptual development is culturally related (Zintz, 1975 and Buck, 1975). Therefore, reading which depicts the stereotypical American view of the home, family, sex roles, and success may be quite baffling to students whose heritage is different from mainstream American life. Prior knowledge then includes all the personal experiences as well as the culturally defined concepts which students bring to the classroom.

Thus, teachers must be aware of the background experiences of their students as well as their level of linguistic competence. The implications of schema theory for content area teachers at the secondary level are clear. "Students must have 'conceptual readinesss' for each task: reading activities must either hook into the students' knowledge of the world, or the teacher must fill in the gaps before the task is begun." (Clarke and Silberstein, 1977, p. 137)

Content area teachers need to recognize that different subject matter requires differing reading skills and background knowledge on the part of the student. Basic reading skills which are pertinent to the various subject areas include: word recognition skills, basic comprehension skills, word meaning skills, reading study skills, interpretative skills, and critical reading skills. (Karlin, 1973, p. 175) Some subjects will require specific skills or a combination of skills more than others.

In the area of mathematics, most LEP students at the secondary level already have a conceptual framework for the number system. Teachers then must provide new labels or vocabulary to hook onto the students' previous mathematical experience. Mastering the specialized vocabulary of math is a must, especially at the secondary level as more prose is introduced into the text and as students are exposed to increasingly complex word problems. Further compounding the difficulty of new vocabulary is the use of familiar words like power and set in new contexts.

Another necessary skill in the mathematics class is problem analysis. "Practice in how to read a problem, how to analyze its content, and how to follow a carefully planned sequence toward its solution may be as necessary to success as computational practice in mathematics." (Thonis, 1970, p. 91) Thus, the secondary math teacher must build a bridge between the LEP student's previous knowledge of numbers, math concepts, and computational skills to new labels and methods of problem solving.

In the science class, the needed skills are very similar to math. Again the student experiences a specialized vocabulary and a need for problem analysis. In order to aid the LEP student with the large amounts of sometimes technical reading material, a general reading strategy which encompasses our pre-reading phase is suggested (Karlin, 1973): become aware of and expand the student's background knowledge; 2) preview material with the student prior to reading attempting to hook onto any previous experiences of class members; 3) explain the basic concepts which are often expressed by the specific vocabulary of the lesson; 4) finally, have the student read with specific purposes in mind. During long reading assignments, breaking the text into chunks is a possible alternative .Then the teacher can intersperse questions between sections in order to detect early misconceptions and miscues which may continue to affect subsequent reading comprehension.

In the task of vocabulary building, an important consideration is whether to provide simple exercises or real activities involving students, such as teacher or student demonstrations. According to Johnson (1982, p. 504) "provision of vicarious or real experiences would fill in or expand the readers' existing culturally determined background knowledge of a topic and prepare them to comprehend and retain material on that topic in the reading passage that followed." Actual personal experiences seem to have a greater impact on compre-

hension than simple vocabulary drill.

The technique of webbing is frequently a useful tool in vocabulary lessons before reading enabling students to build a schema for new words and concepts. It is also useful in the post-reading situation to begin a mapping process. Students are asked to call out their associations with a word while the teacher forms a web diagram showing the interrelationships of the words. Thus, all available schemata for one word are mapped by the class members. For example, leisure time might elicit the following response categories which could be further developed: recreational activities, sports, hobbies, weather related activities, sports equipment, sports clothing, uniforms, etc.

The applicability of schema theory is particularly rich in the area of social sciences. The teacher must be very sensitive to the various backgrounds of students and avoid potentially negative situations that could arise through stereotyping.

Teachers will find posters, displays, pictures, films, and slides indispensable in describing new concepts in the social studies class. In the history class, an organizational strategy such as a timeline can enable students to sequence events and discern cause and effect relationships as they read. Role play and simulation are other techniques to consider in explaining cultural content. In this manner, students build personal experience schema which develop into powerful reading comprehension tools.

Many of the previously discussed skills are also applicable in the area of literature and language arts where there is a strong need for vocabulary building and reading skills. Of prime importance is the skill which enables readers to go beyond the literal meanings. Literature is a rich source of cultural information. However, previewing material to determine the cultural components and values which are expressed is essential for adequate understanding of the text by limited English proficient students. (Johnson, 1982) The

teacher's open attitude will also allow pupils to discuss their confusion regarding the cultural differences noted in the text and will permit students to suggest cultural biases and stereotypes present in some literature.

Study and reference skills cross subject areas as a need found in most courses. Actual hands on experience with reference materials and in the library itself is much more valuable for the LEP student than merely reading about how to use the library. A treasure hunt activity can be organized to acquaint students with locating various sources of information about topics. Students could work in groups or pairs in order to find the necessary clues among the reference materials. In this manner, students are building a personal schema relating to reference skills which will enable them to more successfully utilize these materials at a later date.

In conclusion, students use various skills in order to process textual information. Among these skills are linguistic knowledge of the English language and background knowledge or schema of the reader. These combine in an interactive process of reading with students using syntactic and semantic knowledge to comprehend reading material. In the case of limited English proficient students, both linguistic and background knowledge may not be fully or equally developed which can lead to comprehension difficulties. The reader can utilize one knowledge to compensate for the other. For example, strong semantic input will help the acquisition of the reading competence where syntactic control is weak. This suggests that the subject of reading materials should be of high interest and relate to the background of the learners. (Pimsleur and Quinn, 1971.)

Various strategies have been discussed here with regard to the different content areas in the secondary school. Teachers need to become aware of their students' prior knowledge and level of language competence. As Carrell and

Eisterhold (1983 p. 569) suggest, teachers ". . . must strive for an optimum balance between the background knowledge presupposed by the texts our students read and the background knowledge our students possess." With a knowledge of students' prior experiences, instructors can then build bridges from familiar content to the new.

As stated previously, what we have listed here is not new, but is important to remember when dealing with special needs students. Learning disabled, limited English proficient students, and reading deficient students create special problems for all teachers due to their trouble with processing textual material. Content are teachers at the secondary level are the ones most affected by these students' low reading ability because of their lack of training in reading diagnosis or remediation. While we would not suggest that all content area teachers attempt to gain certification as reading specialists, we would suggest that they can be valuable sources of reading instruction to these low ability readers. If teachers require students to read material to learn information, then they are teaching "about" reading: not necessarily how to do it, but that it is important. This is probably the single most important reading lesson that any teacher can give a child. By emphasizing reading material in the classroom, teachers demonstrate that reading is an access to information and ideas. (Stansell and Lee, in press). Once students realize this, teachers can design lessons and activities to help them process the material and learn the ideas. Before, during, and after reading, teachers can help students with the concepts, vocabulary, and comprehension of the assignment. Reading teachers aren't the only ones qualified to do this. All teachers can help students with reading by using this simple three step strategy. The problems of these special needs students won't go away because the teacher used it, but the advantages of using it are well worth the time and effort.

METHOD FOR READING ASSIGNMENTS

PREREADING (T-A-L-K)

TALK TO YOURSELF

Do you have at least 20 minutes free?
Is there paper and pencil handy?
Is the lighting all right?
Are distractions to a minimum?
How much do I already know?
How interested am I?
How difficult and time consuming will it be?

AGREE ON YOUR PURPOSE:

Writing a paper? *For an essay test?* *Just interested?*
An objective test? *For pleasure?* *An assignment?*

LOOK AT THE MATERIAL:

Are there subtopics? bold face type? conclusion?
How many pages____? charts____? pictures____?
What topics will be covered?

KNOW SOME QUESTIONS TO ASK YOURSELF:

Use the question words who, what, when, where, why *and* how *to help you.*

DURING READING (U-S-E)

UNDERSTANDING is the key. Mark anything you don't understand at the time.

SEE if you've answered your questions. Read again if necessary.

ENLIST the help of the dictionary, lecture notes, or the teacher to aid in understanding.

POST READING (M-O-R-E)

MAP the information showing relationships, an analysis of the key concepts, or main topics versus specific detail.

ORGANIZE your thoughts, digest the material, analyze or paraphrase when necessary. Pick a mneumonic device if needed.

REVIEW the written material to answer any questions you still have.

EXPAND on what you have read and discuss it with yourself or another student.

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